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ABSTRACT

This digest examines the knowledge base for teaching, noting that many critical decisions about educational structure, policy, and assessment rely on it. The professionalization of teaching depends on showing that teaching requires mastery of a specialized body of knowledge that is applied ethically. Serious deliberation is needed in the professional community about types of knowledge required, conceptual frameworks for organizing and using knowledge, and modes of inquiry used in creating and validating knowledge claims. Several knowledge base frameworks have emerged recently, including two sponsored by national associations for teacher education. These frameworks have resulted in discussions about defining the knowledge base. Implications for teaching and teacher education include adding impetus to calls for change in educational curriculum and structure (thus changing preservice and beginning teacher programs). Five criteria for evaluating the extent to which conflicting conceptions of the knowledge base actually inform practice are: (1) relation of different types of knowledge to disciplined inquiry; (2) inclusion of multiple perspectives on teaching and schooling; (3) explanation of the interdependence of technical and normative aspects of teaching; (4) usefulness of the framework; and (5) degree to which it encourages reflective judgment and action. (SM)

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CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

ERIC DIGEST

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The Knowledge Base for Teaching

"What Knowledge Is Needed for Teaching"?

Critical decisions about the (a) content and structure of teacher education, (b) policies and procedures for demonstrating the quality of programs, (c) standards used in evaluating teachers, and (d) systems for assessing and certifying professional competence all depend, in part, on the way this question is answered. Thus, the significance of understanding the issues involved in defining the knowledge base cannot be overemphasized.

At one level, concern about the knowledge base focuses on improving the respect and status accorded teaching, thereby making it a more rewarding career (Shulman, 1987). In this regard, the professionalization of teaching depends on showing that teaching, like other learned professions, requires mastery of a specialized body of knowledge that is applied with wisdom and ethical concern.

Beyond the interest in achieving professional status, questions about appropriate knowledge imply the need for serious deliberation in the professional community about (a) the types of knowledge required and relationships among the categories identified, (b) conceptual frameworks for organizing and using knowledge and (c) the modes of inquiry used in creating and validating knowledge claims in the field. In this way the intellectual and socio-political aspects of the field would be complementary.

This means that the process of determining the knowledge base is communal, i.e., conceptual frameworks, and the norms for judging them, are created and re-created socially. Changes occur with new insights and evaluations through the cooperative efforts of the entire community. Although leaders in the field usually initiate this process, they seek mutuality of understanding within the community. Similarly, attempts to resolve differences in perspective require critical reflection and discussion of alternative conceptualizations, both their limits and possibilities (Valli & Tom, 1988).

In keeping with this tradition, several knowledge base frameworks have emerged recently, including two sponsored by national organizations for teacher education. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) released the *Knowledge Base for Beginning Teachers* (Reynolds, 1989) and the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) released the *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (Houston, 1990).

Issues Concerning Definition and Structure

Current discussions reflect several perspectives and historical concerns that have surrounded attempts to define the knowledge base. As Edelfelt suggested in 1980, the problem of finding some basis for agreement about the definition and organization of the professional knowledge base remains as one of the major challenges facing the field.

Addressing dilemmas related to conceptualization, Griffin (1983) noted that some scholars question the legitimacy of defining "essential" knowledge in teaching, maintaining that adequate definition depends on the ends considered desirable—a matter of judgment, not science. In contrast, others argued that, properly understood, the knowledge base is a framework that consists of several different types of knowledge, including statements about valued ends and the methods used in evaluating or justifying them (Shulman, 1986 & 1987).

Ayers (1988) posed the problem of scope of definition, expressing concern about defining the knowledge base too narrowly and ignoring context, or too broadly and losing clarity and precision. According to Edelfelt (1980), even if there could be agreement on the essential knowledge and skills involved, these understandings would not apply in all teaching situations, given the variations in schools, pupils, faculties, resources, and administrative leadership.

Similarly, several educators cautioned against an over-emphasis on empirical evidence as the sole basis for knowledge about teaching. This parallels concerns about the technical orientation that dominates the professions and current efforts to improve teacher education (Cornbleth, 1986; Henderson, 1988; Schon, 1983). These educators pointed out that results from interpretive and critical studies provide knowledge about other significant aspects of teaching, such as the moral, aesthetic, political, and personal dimensions (Kirk, 1986; Liston & Zeichner, 1987). According to Lather (1986), the failure to include this type of knowledge distorts and limits understanding of teaching. From this view, knowledge about teaching is not separate from actual practice; it is coextensive. Rather than draw from a "storehouse" of knowledge discovered by outside experts, such practical knowledge is created by the teachers themselves (Ayers, 1988).

Finally, still others have concerns that extend beyond questions about the content of the knowledge base. At issue are alternative patterns or frameworks for organizing the professional knowledge base (Shulman, 1988). Starting from distinctions between two conceptions of the knowledge base—an "expert system" in a computer program *versus* the "expert" who possesses the knowledge, history, and rules needed to perform a complex task—Shulman identified several images of how to organize the store: the knowledge base as encyclopedia, library, handbook, manual, or case book.

Implications for Teaching and Teacher Education

A well-defined and organized knowledge base might give added impetus to calls for change in the curriculum and

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structure of SCDEs, resulting in substantially different preservice and beginning teacher programs (Krajewski, Mayfield, & Walden, 1979; Smith, 1982). Furthermore, this could lead to the development and use of "state of the art" standards, materials, and techniques (Gardner, 1989). For instance, recently, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 1985) adopted a standard requiring its members to ground their programs on "established and current research and essential knowledge of sound professional practice" (p. 15). Adherence to this standard and other standards requires that faculties address knowledge base questions.

If teacher educators agree on the knowledge needed and the rigor with which it is to be incorporated in teacher preparation, these developments might lead to added course content and experiences that extend beyond the current four-year programs (AACTE, 1983; Howey & Zimpher, 1986).

Obviously, there is much work to do in resolving these issues and determining the adequacy of frameworks that evolve over time. According to Valli & Tom (1988) teachers and teacher educators can use five criteria to evaluate the extent to which conflicting conceptions of the knowledge base actually inform practice: Are the different types of knowledge included derived from disciplined inquiry? Are multiple perspectives of teaching and schooling included? Is the interdependence of the technical and normative aspects of teaching explained? Is the framework meaningful and useful to teachers? Does it encourage reflective judgment and action?

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